



## Exploring the American Revolution from Multiple Perspectives: Integrating Children's Literature into the Social Studies Curriculum

by Jennifer A. Manak

Colonial America, the Revolutionary War, the Boston Tea Party—these topics commonly studied in intermediate elementary classrooms can be found in traditional social studies textbooks. However, teaching social studies with quality children's literature that explores Revolutionary America from multiple viewpoints can lead to more actively engaged students who are able to construct a more comprehensive understanding of the people and events that shaped American history (George & Stix, 2000).

Teachers can foster critical literacy practices by guiding students to examine the events that occurred during historical periods, such as the Revolutionary War, from various viewpoints (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004; Soares & Wood, 2010). For example, exposing students to the multiple perspectives surrounding the American Revolution will help to dispel misconceptions regarding this time period including that all colonial Americans rebelled against the British and that only males fought in the Revolutionary War. Through sharing

children's literature from various points of view, students will be able to better understand the perspectives of both George Washington and King George III as well as recognize the significant roles of women, young people, African Americans, Native Americans, and the British in the Revolutionary War.

Children's literature can be integrated into the social studies curriculum in several ways including read-alouds, independent reading, literature circles, and text sets. Text sets are composed of several books on a similar topic that represent a range of reading levels and genres. Text sets are an effective way to integrate literature into social studies instruction since they allow students to view a topic from multiple perspectives (George & Stix, 2000; Smith & Johnson, 1994). A comprehensive text set can be developed on a particular topic by selecting approximately 20-25 quality texts that represent a diverse range of reading levels and genres. When selecting a text, it is important to critically evaluate the text including the author's message, perspective, and/

or any misrepresentations within the text (McLaughlin and DeVoogd, 2004).

The following sections share children's literature text sets that can be included in a unit on the American Revolution. The text sets in this unit feature various genres including nonfiction, biographies, and historical fiction, and represent the diverse perspectives of men, women, children, African Americans, Native Americans, Patriots, and Loyalists. A majority of the books in these sets received recognitions and/or awards from professional associations and have been identified as notable trade books by the National Council for the Social Studies.

### Popular Colonial Americans in the Revolutionary War

Were George Washington's teeth made from wood? Was Benjamin Franklin simply an inventor and statesman? This text set surrounding popular colonial Americans will help students become familiar with well-known colonists and better understand these colonists' role in the Revolutionary War. This text set includes *How Ben Franklin Stole the Lightning*



(Schanzer, 2003), *The Amazing Life of Benjamin Franklin* (Giblin, 2001), *Paul Revere's Midnight Ride* (Krensky, 2002), and *George Washington's Teeth* (Chandra and Comora, 2003). After reading this text set, students will learn that over the years George Washington's teeth were actually made from many different materials such as hippopotamus, elephant, and walrus ivory but never from wood (Chandra and Comora, 2003). Of course, students also will learn that Benjamin Franklin was an author, printer, cartoonist, shopkeeper, and world traveler, in addition to being, a well-known inventor and statesman (Schanzer, 2003).

## Women in Revolutionary America

George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Paul Revere were recognized heroes of the American Revolution, but what were women doing during this historical time period? This text set featuring women of



the American Revolution includes *Patriots in Petticoats: Heroines of the American Revolution* (Redmond, 2004), *They Called her Molly Pitcher* (Rockwell, 2002), and *Sybil Ludington's Midnight Ride* (Amstel, 2000). These texts share stories of women who fought for our country's freedom as patriots, spies, nurses, needle workers, defenders, and soldiers. Students will learn how Sybil Ludington rode twice the distance as Paul Revere alerting that the British were coming. They also will learn that Deborah Sampson served in Washington's army as a man for over a year. After reading this text set, students will learn that history can be "herstory," too!

## Young People in Revolutionary America

Did young people contribute to the development of our nation? This text set sharing the perspectives of young people in Revolutionary America includes *The Winter of Red Snow: The Revolutionary War Diary of Abigail Jane Stewart* (Gregory, 1996) and *The Journal of William Thomas Emerson, a Revolutionary War Patriot*



(Denenberg, 1998). These texts as well as chapters from *Patriots in Petticoats: Heroines of the American Revolution* (Redmond, 2004), *Everybody's Revolution: A New Look at the people who won America's Freedom* (Fleming, 2006), and *We Were There, Too!: Young People in U.S. History* (Hoose, 2001) share how young people shaped American history with their beliefs, words, and heroic acts.

## African Americans and Native Americans in Revolutionary America

What were the roles of Native Americans and African Americans in the Revolutionary War? This text set about both African Americans and Native Americans in Revolutionary America includes *Building a New Land: African*



*Americans in Colonial America* (Haskins and Benson, 2001), *Benjamin Banneker: Pioneering Scientist* (Wadsworth, 2003), *Dear Benjamin Banneker* (Pinkney, 1994), as well as chapters in *Everybody's Revolution: A New Look at the people who won America's Freedom* (Fleming, 2006). When reading this text set, students will learn about the many African Americans who fought in the American Revolution and how African Americans, such as Benjamin Banneker, influenced colonial America. Students also will learn that while many Native American tribes were loyal to the colonists, some Native Americans fought alongside the British.

## The Loyalists vs. the Patriots

Was King George a British bully pushing around the American colonies? Was George Washington a traitor fighting against the British crown? Since there are multiple perspectives of every historical event, the Revolutionary War can be examined from both the British and colonial American points of view. This text set includes *George vs. George: The*



*Revolutionary War as Seen from Both Sides* (Schanzer, 2004) which provides students with a comprehensive understanding of the causes, events, and effects of the Revolutionary War on the American colonies and Britain. In addition, *Sleds on Boston Common: A Story from the American Revolution* (Borden, 2000) shares both the colonial American and British perspectives of life in Boston during the Revolutionary War. These texts will expose students to the perspectives of both Patriots and Loyalists and allows students to consider both sides of the Revolutionary War.

After reading these text sets, students will learn that women, children, African Americans, and Native Americans, as well as men, British Loyalists, and Patriots, all played a significant role in the American Revolution. Integrating children's literature into the social studies curriculum will engage students in the content and encourage them to develop an understanding of events from multiple perspectives.

For a list of children's books cited, sorted alphabetically by author, visit *Reading Today Online* at [www.reading.org/readingtoday](http://www.reading.org/readingtoday).

## References

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